

A Yukon Story

By Pte. G. S. Fitzmaurice, 72nd Seaforth Highlanders.



Pte. Geo. S. Fitzmaurice was born in London, England, and came out to Canada over twenty years ago. After spending two years in the North-West, he came to British Columbia and engaged in fruit ranching in the Okanagan Valley about six years. Leaving the Okanagan he came to the Coast, going afterward to Atlin, from where he moved into the Yukon. After spending several years in the North he returned to Vancouver, and from there went to Prince Rupert, where he was in business when the war broke out. He enlisted for overseas in 1915 and joined the 72nd in Vancouver. He was invalided home in the late fall of 1918 and is at present a patient in the Military Hospital at Qualicum, Vancouver Island.

ALL Westerners, and, in fact, the world generally know by this time the type of man that comes back from "up North," as Alaska and the Yukon are familiarly called. One has to use the term "come back," because they had to go there first from somewhere, as before the big gold rush of '97 and '98, the

number of men who had penetrated into the great unknown Northland, was, comparatively speaking, but a handful, and one could almost count on one's fingers, the native born white men, who could claim the distinction of being cradled "North of '53." However, nowadays, Alaskans and Yukoners of the '98 brew rank as pioneers and frontiersmen of the first water alright. Well there were two of them in Bill Banham and Hughie McLeod. They were both typical Canadians, born in Eastern Canada, of the good old English and Scots stock, that started hewing out homes for themselves in the vast virgin forests of Ontario, Quebec, and the Maritime provinces, long, long years ago. It is hard to find men nowadays who have the stuff in them to tackle the jobs our forefathers did. But there are some; and it was in the Klondike in the early days, that they were to be found.

Well then, the Great War came.

It took some time for the news that Great Britain had, as was to be expected, stood by her pledge to little Belgium, and declared war on Germany on that momentous summer evening at the beginning of August, '14, to reach many of the furthestmost outposts of the Empire.

Bill and Hughie were away off on a lonely creek a hundred and fifty or sixty miles or so west of Whitehorse. They had then put in sixteen years in the Yukon; they had been partners for close on thirty, and but little they knew or cared about European politics. Bill was by far the most go-ahead of the two. Hughie being of a quiet, silent temperament, one of those men that says little, but does things. Their first idea upon hearing the news, was to "mush" in right away and join up at the nearest recruiting place, which was of course Whitehorse. Both men, by the way, were verging on fifty years of age. However, as the story was at first very vague and meagre, Bill got hold of their old pack cayuse, and with a couple of days grub, proceeded to beat it into "town" to size up the situation, leaving Hughie to look after the claim, and kind of straighten things up, so that they would be ready to leave on the jump if things were as serious as rumor had it. It never for a minute seemed to occur to them that there was any question about their going, or being accepted as recruits. Upon arrival in "town," which, of course, was in a seething state of excitement, as all the little

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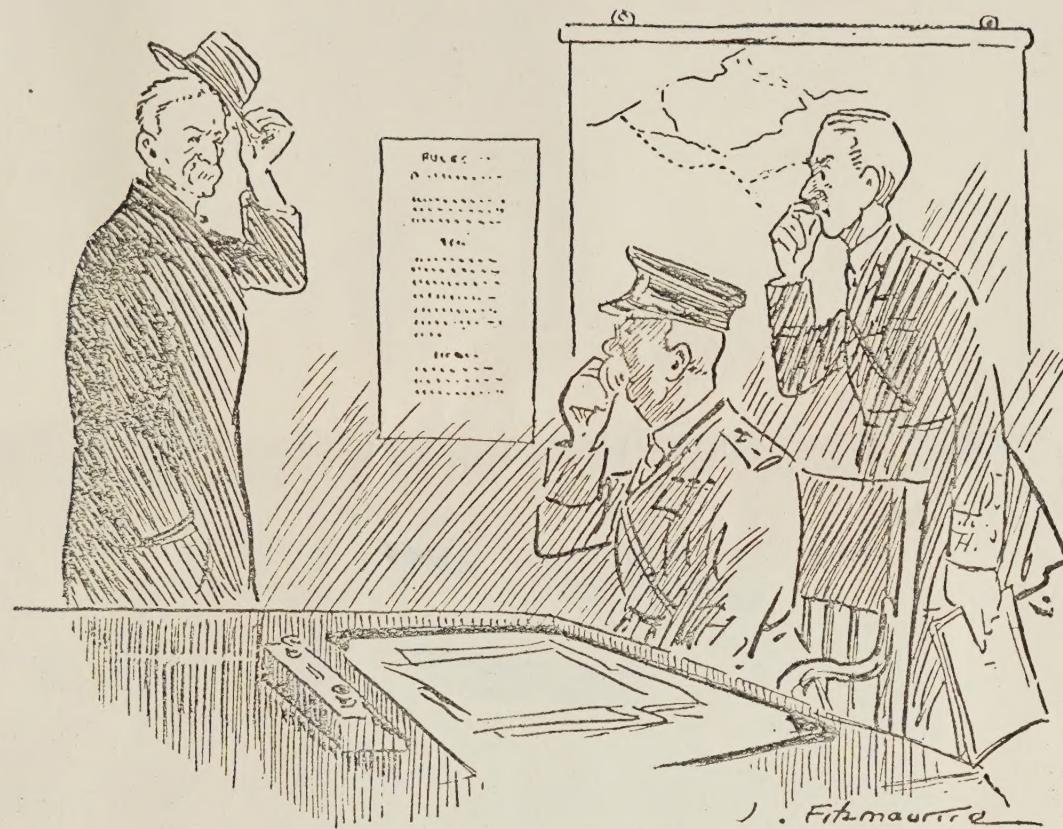
Bill and Hughie were away off on a lonely creek.

places, far away from anywhere, were in those tragic days, Bill at once saw the local doctor, who was acting as recruiting officer. The Doc' laughed, "Why Bill," he said, "You're a pretty husky tough sort of a chap alright, but away over age for this army stuff, see, here are the rules and regulations."

Bill's expression was a study. One of the points the Doc' mentioned, was imperfect teeth. "Say Doc'," Bill replied, "I might get kind of mad of course when I got out there, but I didn't figure on having to eat the goldarned Dutchmen." Well, this was a bit of an unexpected turn of events, and the tall, lithe, sinewy Northerner was not satisfied at letting it go at that. He bought a ticket for Victoria right away, determined to see the higher authorities, who would, of course, accept him, and he would soon be on the way to Germany with the bunch. He sent word of his doings to his partner, tell-

ing him to come right along, as they would sure be able to connect up in a short while. At Victoria things were decidedly confusing, nothing but clerks rushing around all day, hundreds of men, all ages and sizes standing around, impatiently awaiting information as to what was going to happen to them next, as regards getting them overseas. The old motherland was in trouble and it was there that they must be, right away quick. Over age, was again the answer that Bill got to his application for enlistment. The recruiting officer, who in the nature of things was up to his eyes in work, of course could not spend much time in explanations, in refusing Bill's humble demand to be allowed to go off to a foreign land, and probably give up his life for his country. Bill took a ticket for Ottawa. A man who could drop a mountain sheep at three hundred yards, pack eighty pounds on his back all day in a sweltering sun, or "mush" behind a dog-team over the Arctic trails in the dead of winter with the thermometer at fifty below, was not going to be kept back, when there was "a general rush," a big stampede on; only this time it was not gold that was the lure. Arriving at Ottawa, his first time East for thirty years, Bill was kind of lost in the big city. A cocky and dapper little French Canadian doctor turned him down cold, without as much as word of regret that he was unable to pass him for overseas. The old Klondiker set his lips. "H—l," he muttered to himself, "We'll have to go to the head bosses of this show, and I guess London will be my next stopping place." It wasn't a very exciting trip for poor Bill. His travelling companions were not of the class that held much interest for him, but he did not mind, he was on the way. Of Bill's experiences upon arrival at Liverpool, and later in London much might be written. The poor old motherland was sure in a turmoil, and, of course, he was lost in the general scramble. He located the War Office though, and made his application to enlist, which was getting a bit stereotyped by this time. Upon the officials realizing what kind of a man was here, credit must be given the much abused department, they expressed sorrow at not being able to grant his wish. It was certainly very fine and patriotic of him, and they would be glad to enlist him for home service.

"Home service be d—," said Bill. "Do you think I have 'mushed' eight thousand miles, to stay here in this Noah's Ark country, and be a toy soldier? Nothing doing. I want to have a crack at them Dutchmen." He left the War Office and wandered for a week around the streets of the world's greatest city. Surely



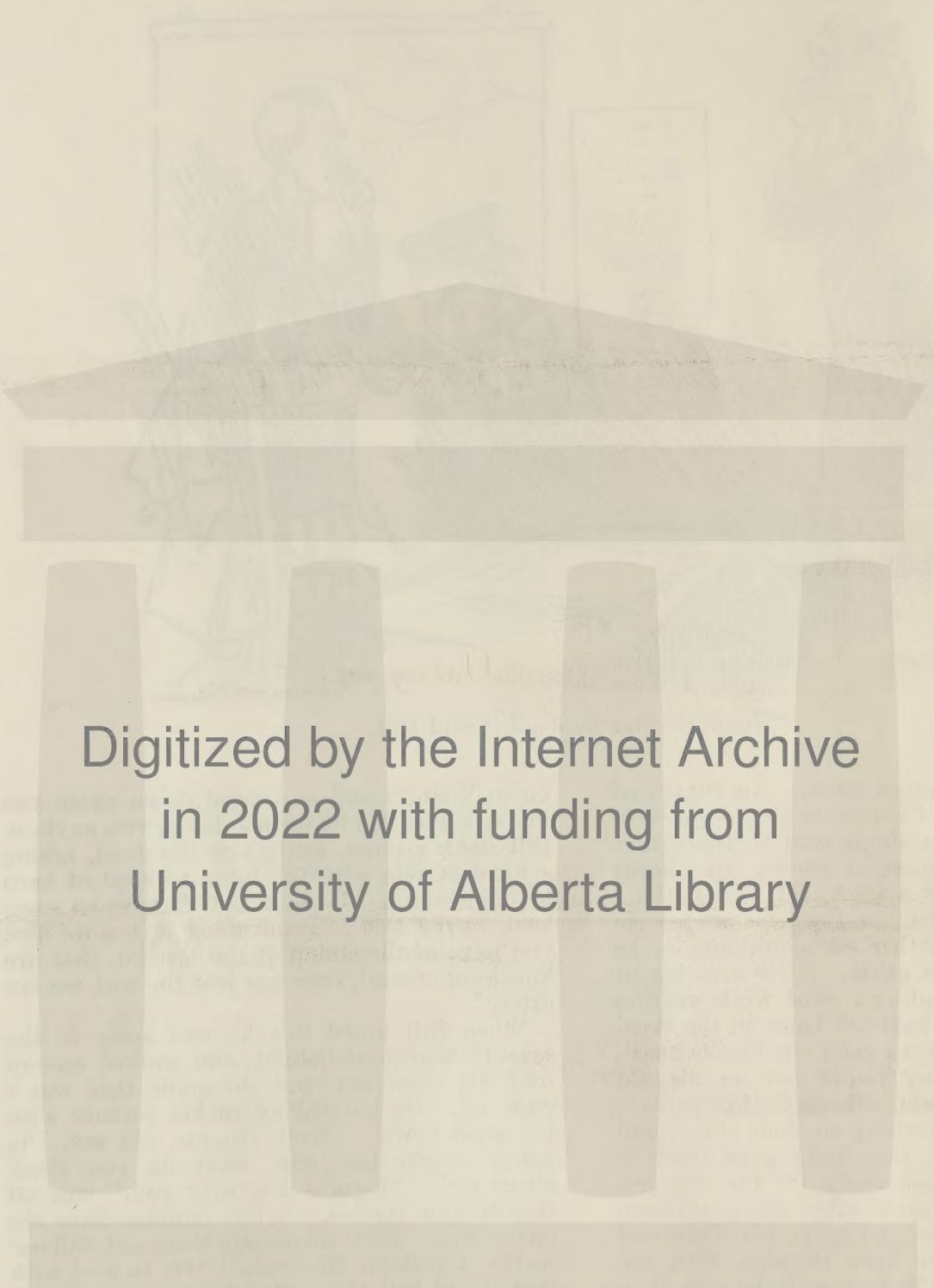
"Home Service be d—d," said Bill.

never was a man more lonely. In that vast homogeneous mass of humanity he did not seem to be able to find a single soul to foregather with. Many were there of course, but where? At the expiration of a week, Bill saw nothing for it but to hit back for God's country. He was powerless to further his ambition. So he set sail for the West again. After arriving at New York, and spending a short while visiting the old folks at his boyhood home in the East, he hied him back to the good old Pacific coast, and the early spring found him in his old beloved Yukon again. He and his partner spent the summer working on their claim, and before the fall set in, they had a good stock of grub out on the creek ready for the winter's work. Now many men, after going through what Bill had, to try and serve his King and country, would have been through with the business, and said, "To h—l with the war, they can fight it out their own way now." But not so Bill. Shortly before he and his partner Hughie were to pull out with their last load of grub, to settle down for the winter, he approached his friend the Doc' again. "Isn't there any chance of getting in on this scrap at all Doc'?" he asked. The latter replied, "Well, see here Bill, a bunch of men went down yesterday, and if they are accepted, why there is a chance for you. I don't want though, you to

go to Victoria and be turned down again you know, I'll let you know in a day or two anyhow. Bill stuck around, restless as the devil, taking a hand at solo with the boys, to kind of keep his mind occupied. In a few days word came back to the Doc', "Send along any more men you have of the stamp of the last lot, that are knocking around, they are just the sort we are after."

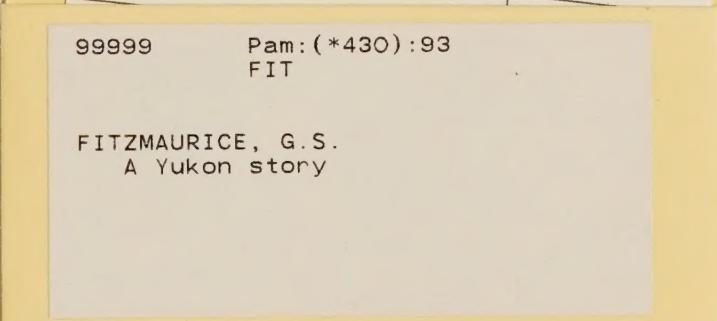
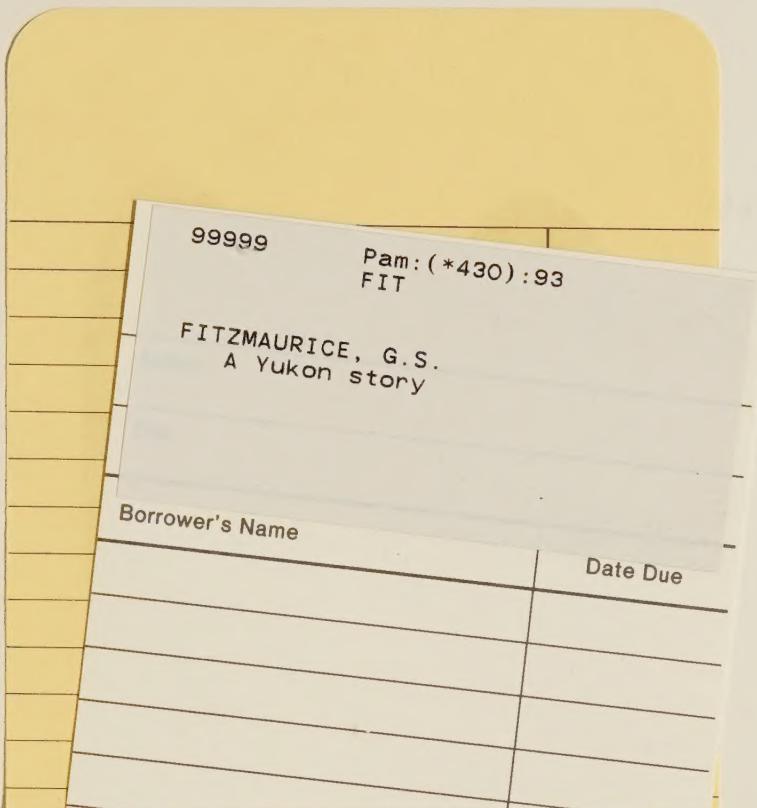
When Bill heard this he was away in the seventh heaven of delight, and walked around with his chest out, and the smile that won't wear off. He hurried up to his partner with the good news. "Well, Hughie, old sox, I'm going alright this trip, what do you think about it?" "I guess I'm with you," was all that Hughie replied. A few minutes later the latter said, "What about our thousand dollars' worth of grub on the creek?" "Oh to h—l with that," said Bill, "the other boys can use it. If we come back they can fix us up then; if not, why what will it matter." So the two tough, hardy Yukoners joined as fine a battalion as ever left Canada, the 67th, the Western Scots, and a year or so afterwards were "carrying on" up to their waists in the mud of the Somme in those terrible days in November, '16.

This is a true story. Those two stalwarts as far as the writer knows, got through and may be back in their old haunts.



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